



Ahimsā

Newsletter of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship

December 2005 (2549)

The Four Noble Truths

The Essence of the Dhamma

The *Dhamma*, or universal moral law discovered by the Buddha, is summed up in Four Noble Truths (*Ariya-Sacca*): the Truth about the universal sway of suffering (*dukkha*), about its origin (*samudaya*), its cessation (*nirodha*), and the path leading to its cessation (*magga*).

1. The first Truth, about the universality of suffering, teaches, in short, that all forms of existence are uncertain, transient, contingent, and devoid of intrinsic self-identity and are, therefore, by their very nature subject to suffering.

“Now, monks, this is the Noble Truth as to suffering: Birth (earthly existence) indeed is suffering; old age is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; likewise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. Contact with the unpleasant is suffering, separation from the pleasant is suffering; not to get what one wants is also suffering. In brief, desirous transient individuality (the five aggregates of bodily form, feeling, perception, predisposing mental formations, and discriminative consciousness) is suffering.”

2. The second Truth, about the origin of suffering, teaches that all suffering is rooted in selfish craving (*taṇhā*) and ignorance (*avijjā*). It further explains the cause of this seeming

injustice in nature by teaching that nothing in the world can come into existence without a reason or a cause and that, not only all our latent tendencies, but our whole destiny, all weal and woe, results from causes that can be traced partly in this life and partly in former states of existence.

The second Truth further teaches us that the future life, with all its weal and woe, must result from the seeds sown in this life and in former lives.

“And again, monks, this is the Noble Truth as to the origin of suffering: It is that craving, associated with enjoyment and desire and seeking pleasure everywhere, which produces separate existence and leads to future births, and which keeps lingering on and on, that is the cause of suffering. In other words, it is craving for sense-pleasure, the desire for birth in a world of separateness, and the desire for existence to end.”

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Activities

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship:

- Conducts informal seminars on Buddhism.
- Prepares and distributes free educational material.

Programs

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship sponsors the following programs:

- Instructions in meditation.
- Dhamma study groups.
- Retreats (at IMC-USA).

There are no fees for any of the activities or programs offered by the organization. Seminars are designed to present basic information about Buddhism to the general public — anyone may attend. However, study groups and meditation instructions are open to members only.

Retreats last ten days and are coordinated through IMC-USA in Westminster, MD (410-346-7889). Fees are set by IMC-USA. Advance registration is required.

One-on-one discussions about one's individual practice or about Buddhism in general are also available upon request. These discussions are accorded confidential treatment. There is no fee for one-on-one discussions. ■

Purpose of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship is an educational organization whose purpose is to preserve and promote the original teachings of the Buddha in the West.

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship actively encourages an ever-deepening process of commitment among Westerners to live a Buddhist way of life in accordance with the original teachings of the Buddha.

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship provides free educational material to those who want to learn about Buddhism and about how to put the teachings of the Buddha into practice.

The goals of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship are:

1. To provide systematic instruction in the Dhamma, based primarily on Pali sources.
2. To promote practice of the Dhamma in daily life.
3. To provide guidance on matters relating to the Dhamma, its study, and its practice.
4. To encourage the study of the Pali language and literature.
5. To maintain close contact with individuals and groups interested in promoting and supporting the foregoing goals. ■

Dhamma Study Group

An on-going Dhamma study group focusing on the basic teachings of the Buddha is meeting Sunday mornings at 11:00 o'clock at the home of Allan Bomhard (940 Rutledge Avenue, Charleston, SC 29403-3206). Call (843) 720-8531 for directions to Allan's home. There is no fee to participate in this group. ■

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3. The third Truth, or the Truth about the cessation of suffering, shows how, through the abandoning of craving and ignorance, all suffering will vanish and liberation from *Samsāra* will be attained.

“And this, monks, is the Noble Truth as to the cessation of suffering: It is the complete cessation, giving up, abandoning of craving; it is release and detachment from craving.”

4. The fourth Truth shows the way, or the means, by which this goal is to be reached. It is the Noble Eightfold Path of Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

“And this once again, monks, is the Noble Truth as to the path to the cessation of suffering: It is indeed that Noble Eightfold Path: Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration. The Middle Path, monks, leads to Nibbāna.”

Each Truth requires that it be acted upon in its own particular way — *understanding* suffering (anguish), *letting go* of its origin, *realizing* its cessation, and *cultivating* the path. In describing to the five ascetics what His awakening meant, the Buddha spoke of having discovered complete freedom of heart and mind from the compulsions of craving. He called such freedom the taste of *Dhamma*.

The First Noble Truth

The first Truth deals with *Dukkha*, which,

for want of a better English equivalent, is rendered by “suffering” or “sorrow.” As a feeling, *Dukkha* means that which is difficult to be endured. As an abstract truth, *Dukkha* is used in the sense of “contemptible” and “emptiness.” The world rests on suffering — hence, it is contemptible. The world is devoid of any intrinsic reality — hence it is empty or void. *Dukkha* can, therefore, be taken to mean “contemptible void.”

Average men only see the surface. An Ariya sees things as they truly are. To an Ariya, all life is, by nature, suffering, and he finds no real happiness in this world, which deceives mankind with illusory pleasures. Material happiness is merely the gratification of some desire. “No sooner is the desired thing gained than it begins to be scorned.” Insatiate are all desires.

All are subject to birth (*jāti*), and, consequently, to decay (*jarā*), disease (*vyādhī*), and finally to death (*maraṇa*). No one is exempt from these four inevitable causes of suffering.

Not getting what one wants is also suffering. We do not wish to be conjoined with things or persons we dislike, nor do we wish to be separated from things or persons we like. Our cherished desires are not, however, always gratified. What we least expect or what we least desire is often thrust upon us. At times, such unexpected unpleasant circumstances become so intolerable and painful that some people are driven to commit suicide, as if such an act would solve their problems.

Real happiness is found within and is not defined in terms of wealth, power, honors, or conquests. If such worldly possessions are forcibly or unjustly obtained, or are misdirected, or even viewed with attachment, they will be a source of pain and sorrow for the possessors.

Ordinarily, the enjoyment of sensory pleasures is the highest and only happiness to an average person. There is, no doubt, a momentary happiness in the anticipation, gratification, and recollection of such fleeting material pleasures, but

they are illusory and temporary. According to the Buddha, non-attachment (*virāgatā*), or the transcending of material pleasures, is a greater happiness.

In brief, this composite body itself is a cause of suffering.

This First Truth of suffering, which depends upon this so-called “being” and various aspects of life, is to be carefully analyzed and examined. This examination leads to a proper understanding of oneself as one really is.

The Second Noble Truth

The Dhammapada states:

“From craving springs grief, from craving springs fear. For him who is wholly free from craving, there is no grief, much less fear.”

This craving is a powerful mental force latent in all and is the chief cause of most of the ills of life. It is this craving, gross or subtle, that leads to repeated births in *Samsāra* and makes one cling to all forms of life.

The grossest forms of craving are weakened on attaining *Sakadāgāmi*, the second stage of Sainthood, and are eradicated completely on attaining *Anāgāmi*, the third stage of Sainthood. The subtle forms of craving, on the other hand, are eradicated only upon attaining Arahantship.

Both suffering and craving can only be eradicated by following the Middle Way, enunciated by the Buddha Himself, and attaining the supreme bliss of *Nibbāna*.

The Third Noble Truth

The Third Noble Truth is the complete

cessation of suffering, which is *Nibbāna*, the ultimate Goal of Buddhists. It is achieved by the total eradication of all forms of craving. This *Nibbāna* is to be comprehended by the mental eye by renouncing all internal attachment to the external world.

The Fourth Noble Truth

The Third Noble Truth, the cessation of suffering, has to be realized by developing the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the Fourth Noble Truth. This unique path is the only straight route that leads to *Nibbāna*. It avoids the extreme of self-mortification, which weakens one’s intellect, and the extreme of self-indulgence, which retards one’s moral progress.

The Noble Eightfold Path is the path of righteousness and wisdom that really constitutes the essence of Buddhist practice — the mode of living and thinking to be followed by any true follower of the Buddha’s teachings. The Noble Eightfold Path can be summed up as follows:

1. The first stage of the Eightfold Path is Right Understanding (*Sammā Dīṭṭhi*), that is, to view in accordance with reality suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to the cessation of suffering. This leads to an understanding of the true nature of existence and of the moral laws governing the same. In other words, it is the right understanding of the *Dhamma*, of the Four Noble Truths. This right understanding is the keynote of Buddhism.
2. The second stage of the Eightfold Path is Right Thought (or Right Intention) (*Sammā Saṃkappa*), that is, thoughts of renunciation (*nekkhamma*), free from craving, of goodwill (*avyāpāda*), free from aversion, and of compassion (*avihiṃsā*), free from cruelty. This leads to a pure and balanced state of

mind, free from sensual lust, ill will, and cruelty.

By *Samkappa* is meant the mental state (*vitakka*), which, for want of a better English rendering, may be called “initial application.” This important mental state eliminates wrong ideas, or notions, and helps the other moral adjuncts to be diverted to *Nibbāna*.

It is one’s thoughts that either defile or purify a person. One’s thoughts mold one’s nature and control one’s destiny. Evil thoughts tend to debase one just as good thoughts tend to elevate one. Sometimes a single thought can either destroy or save a world.

Sammā Samkappa serves the double purpose of eliminating evil thoughts and developing pure thoughts. Right thoughts, in this connection are threefold: thoughts (1) of renunciation (*nekkhamma*), (2) of goodwill (*avyāpāda*), and (3) of compassion (*avihiṃsā*).

These good and evil forces are latent in all. As long as we are worldlings (*puthujjana*), these evil forces rise to the surface at unexpected moments in disconcerting strength. When once they are totally eradicated on attaining Arahantship, one’s stream of consciousness has become perfectly purified.

Attachment and hatred, coupled with ignorance, are the chief causes of all evil prevalent in this deluded world. “The enemy of the whole world is lust, through which all evils come to living beings. This lust, when obstructed by some cause, is transformed into wrath.”

One is either attached to desirable external objects or repulsed with aversion in the case of undesirable objects. Through attachment, one clings to material pleasures and tries to gratify one’s desires by some means or other. Through aversion, one recoils from undesirable objects and even goes to the

extent of destroying them, inasmuch as their very presence is a source of irritation. With the giving up of egoism by one’s own intuitive insight, both attachment and hatred automatically disappear.

The Dhammapada states:

“There is no fire like lust, no grip like hatred. There is no net like delusion, no river like craving.”

As one ascends the spiritual ladder, one renounces by degrees both gross and subtle involvement in material pleasures, like grown-up children giving up their childhood toys. Being children, they cannot be expected to possess an adult’s understanding, and they cannot be convinced of the worthlessness of their temporary pleasures. With maturity, they begin to understand things as they truly are, and they voluntarily give up their toys. As the spiritual pilgrim proceeds on the upward path by his constant meditation and reflection, he perceives the futility of pursuing base material pleasures and the resultant happiness in forsaking them. He cultivates non-attachment to the fullest degree. “Happy is non-attachment in this world, so is the transcending of all sensory pleasures,” is one of the early utterances of the Buddha.

The other most troublesome defilement is anger, aversion, ill will, or hatred, all of which are implied by the Pali term *Vyāpāda*. It consumes the person in whom it arises and consumes others as well. The Pali term *Avyāpāda*, literally, “nonenmity,” corresponds to the most beautiful virtue *Mettā*, which means “loving-kindness” or “goodwill towards all without any distinction.” He whose mind is full of loving-kindness can harbor no hatred towards anyone. Like a mother who makes no difference between herself and her only child and protects it even at the risk of her own life,

even so does the spiritual pilgrim who follows this Middle Path radiate his thoughts of loving-kindness, identifying himself with all. Buddhist *Mettā* embraces all living beings, animals not excluded.

Harmlessness (*avihiṃsā*), or compassion (*karuṇā*), is the third and last member of *Samkappa*.

Karuṇā is that sweet virtue that makes the tender hearts of the noble quiver at the sufferings of others. Like Buddhist *Mettā*, Buddhist *Karuṇā* is limitless. It is not restricted only to co-religionists or co-nationals or even to human beings alone. Compassion limited in any way is not true *Karuṇā*.

A compassionate one is as soft as a flower. He cannot bear the sufferings of others. He might, at times, even go to the extent of sacrificing his own life to alleviate the sufferings of others. In every *Jātaka* story, it is evident that the Bodhisatta tries his best to help the distressed and the forlorn and to promote their happiness in every possible way.

Karuṇā has the characteristics of a loving mother, whose thoughts, words, and deeds always tend to relieve the distress of her sick child. It has the property of not being able to tolerate the suffering of others. Its manifestation is perfect non-violence and harmlessness — that is, a compassionate person appears to be absolutely non-violent and harmless. The sight of the helpless states of the distressed is the proximate cause for the practice of *Karuṇā*. The consummation of *Karuṇā* is the eradication of all forms of cruelty. The direct enemy of *Karuṇā* is cruelty, and the indirect enemy is homely grief.

Buddhist *Mettā* appeals to both the rich and the poor, for Buddhism teaches its followers to elevate the lowly, help the poor, the needy, and the forlorn, tend the sick,

comfort the bereaved, pity the wicked, and enlighten the ignorant.

Compassion forms the fundamental principle of both Buddhist lay persons and members of the Holy Order.

The Buddha advises His disciples thus:

“Wherefore, O Bhikkhus, however men may speak concerning you, whether in season or out of season, whether appropriately or inappropriately, whether courteously or rudely, whether wisely or foolishly, whether kindly or maliciously, thus, O Bhikkhus, must you train yourselves: ‘Unsullied shall our minds remain, neither shall evil words escape our lips. Kind and compassionate ever shall we abide, with hearts harboring no ill will. And we shall enfold those very persons with streams of loving thoughts unfailing, and proceeding forth from them, we shall radiate the whole wide world with constant thoughts of loving-kindness, ample, expanding, measureless, free from enmity, free from ill will.’ Thus must you train yourselves.”

He whose mind is free from selfish desires, hatred, and cruelty, and is saturated with the spirit of selflessness, loving-kindness, and harmlessness, lives in perfect peace. He is indeed a blessing to himself and others.

3. The third stage is Right Speech (*Sammā Vācā*). It consists in abstinence from false speech, malicious speech, harsh speech, and useless speech. In other words, right speech is speech that is not false, not harsh, not scandalous, not frivolous, that is, it consists of speech that is truthful, mild, pacifying, gentle, and wise.

He who tries to eradicate selfish desires cannot indulge in uttering falsehood or in slandering for any selfish end or purpose. He

is truthful and trustworthy and ever seeks the good and beautiful in others instead of deceiving, defaming, denouncing, or disuniting his own fellow beings. A harmless mind that generates loving-kindness cannot give vent to harsh speech that first debases the speaker and then hurts another. What he utters is not only true, sweet, and pleasant but also useful, fruitful, and beneficial.

4. The fourth stage is Right Action (*Sammā Kammanta*), that is, abstaining from intentional killing or harming any living creature, abstaining from taking what is not freely given, abstaining from sexual misconduct (adultery, rape, and seduction), and abstaining from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness.

These evil deeds are caused by craving and anger, coupled with ignorance. With the gradual elimination of these causes from the mind of the spiritual aspirant, blameworthy tendencies arising from them will no longer be manifested. Under no pretext will one kill or steal. Being pure in mind, one leads a pure life.

5. The fifth stage is Right Livelihood (*Sammā Ājīva*): giving up wrong livelihood, one earns one's living by a right form of livelihood, that is, from a livelihood that does not bring harm and suffering to other beings (avoiding soothsaying, trickery, dishonesty, usury, and trading in weapons, meat, living beings, intoxicants, or poison).

Hypocritical conduct is cited as wrong livelihood for monks and nuns.

Strictly speaking, from an Abhidhamma standpoint, by right speech, right action, and right livelihood, three abstinences (*virati*) are meant, but not the three opposite virtues.

6. The sixth stage is Right Effort (*Sammā Vāyāma*). It is the fourfold effort to put forth the energy, to prod the mind, and to struggle:

- a. To prevent unarisen unwholesome mental states from arising;
- b. To abandon unwholesome mental states that have already arisen;
- c. To develop wholesome mental states that have not yet arisen;
- d. To maintain and perfect wholesome mental states that have already arisen.

In other words, it is the fourfold effort that we make to overcome and avoid fresh bad actions by body, speech, and mind and the effort that we make in developing fresh actions of righteousness, inner peace, and wisdom, and in cultivating them to perfection.

Right Effort plays a very important part in the Noble Eightfold Path. It is by one's own effort that one obtains deliverance and not by merely seeking refuge in others or by offering prayers.

Both a rubbish-heap of evil and a storehouse of virtue are found in man. By effort, one removes this rubbish-heap and cultivates the latent virtues.

7. The seventh stage is Right Mindfulness (*Sammā Sati*), or alertness of mind. It consists of abiding self-possessed and attentive, contemplating according to reality:

- a. The body (*kāyānupassanā*);
- b. Feelings (*vedānupassanā*);
- c. The state of the mind (*cittānupassanā*);
- d. The contents of the mind (*dhammānupassanā*);

seeing all as composite, ever-becoming, impermanent, and subject to decay. It is maintaining ever-ready mental clarity no

matter what we are doing, speaking, or thinking and in keeping before our mind the realities of existence, that is, the impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and egolessness (*anattā*) of all forms of existence.

Mindfulness on these four objects tends to eradicate misconceptions with regard to desirability (*subha*), so-called “happiness” (*sukha*), permanence (*nicca*), and an immortal soul (*attā*) respectively.

8. The eighth stage is Right Concentration of mind (*Sammā Samādhi*). It consists of gaining one-pointedness of mind and entering into and abiding in the four fine-material absorptions (*rūpa jhānas*) and the four immaterial absorptions (*arūpa jhānas*). Such a kind of mental concentration is one that is directed towards a morally wholesome object and always bound up with right thought, right effort, and right mindfulness.

A concentrated mind acts as a powerful aid to see things as they truly are by means of penetrative insight.

Thus, the Noble Eightfold Path is a path of morality (*sīla*), of mental training (*samādhi*), and of wisdom (*paññā*).

Morality consists of Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. Mental training consists of Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. Wisdom consists of Right Understanding and Right Thought.

According to the order of development, morality (*sīla*), mental training (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) are the three stages of the Path.

Thus, this liberating Eightfold Path is a path of inner training, of inner progress. By mere external worship, mere ceremonies and selfish prayer, one can never make any real progress in righteousness and insight. As the Buddha said:

“Be your own island of refuge, be your own shelter, seek not for any other protection. Let the truth be your island of refuge, let the truth be your shelter, seek not after any other protection.”

To be of real effect and to ensure absolute inner progress, all our efforts must be based upon our own understanding and insight. All absolute inner progress is rooted in Right Understanding, and, without Right Understanding, there is no attainment of perfection and of the unshakable peace of *Nibbāna*.

Strictly speaking, from an ultimate point of view, the factors that make up the Noble Eightfold Path signify eight mental properties (*cetasika*) collectively found in four classes of supramundane consciousness (*lokuttara citta*), whose object is *Nibbāna*. They are:

1. Faculty of wisdom (*paññindriya*);
2. Initial application (*vitakka*);
3. Abstinence (*virati*) from wrong speech;
4. Abstinence (*virati*) from wrong action;
5. Abstinence (*virati*) from wrong livelihood;
6. Energy (*viriya*);
7. Mindfulness (*sati*);
8. One-pointedness (*ekaggatā*).

All these factors denote the mental attitude of the aspirant who is striving to gain Deliverance.

Morality

For Buddhist monks, the training in morality consists of the observance of 227 rules, while Buddhist nuns must follow an additional set of rules. The collection of these rules is called the *Pāṭimokkha*, that is, the “Code of Conduct” or “Disciplinary Rules,” and is a part of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*.

Lay practitioners observe either five or

eight rules of moral training, the so-called “five precepts” (*pañca sīla*) or “eight precepts” (*aṭṭha sīla*). In any kind of spiritual development, we need to establish our practice on moral principles so that we feel self-respect and stability. The training rules provide a guide that we can use for behavior in our daily lives, and they provide the foundation for the practice of meditation and the attainment of wisdom.

Five Precepts (*Pañca Sīla*):

1. To abstain from taking life
2. To abstain from taking what is not freely given
3. To abstain from sexual misconduct
4. To abstain from false speech
5. To abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness

Eight Precepts (*Aṭṭha Sīla* — also called *Uposatha Sīla*):

1. To abstain from taking life
2. To abstain from taking what is not freely given
3. To abstain from all sexual activity
4. To abstain from false speech
5. To abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness
6. To abstain from eating any solid food after noon
7. To abstain from dancing, singing, music, and unseemly shows; from the use of garlands, perfumes, and unguents; and from things that tend to beautify and adorn
8. To abstain from high and luxurious beds and seats

The purpose of moral training is to bring physical and verbal action under control.

“Now I will tell you of the rules of conduct

for a householder, acting according to which, he becomes a good disciple. If there be monk-duty to be performed, such duty cannot be fulfilled by him who possesses household property.

“Let him not destroy life nor cause others to destroy life and, also, not approve of others’ killing. Let him refrain from oppressing all living beings in the world, whether strong or weak.

“Then because the disciple knows that it belongs to others, stealing anything from any place should be avoided. Let him not cause to steal, nor approve of others’ stealing. All stealing should be avoided.

“The wise man should avoid non-celibate life as if it were a burning charcoal pit. If he is unable to lead a celibate life fully, let him not transgress with another’s wife.

“Whether he is in an assembly or in a public place, let him not tell lies to another. Let him not cause others to tell lies nor approve of others’ telling lies.

“The householder who delights in self-control, knowing that taking intoxicants results in its loss, should not indulge in taking intoxicants, nor should he cause others to take them nor approve of others doing so. Fools commit evil deeds as a result of drunkenness and cause other people, who are negligent, to act accordingly. One should avoid this sphere of evil deeds, this madness, this delusion, this delight of fools.

“(1) One should not destroy life; (2) should not take that which is not given; (3) should not tell lies; (4) should not be a drinker; (5) should refrain from all unchastity; (6) should not eat untimely food at night; (7) should not wear ornaments nor use perfumes; (8) should

lie on a mat spread on the ground. This they call the eightfold sacred observance proclaimed by the Buddha, who came to do away with sorrow. Being happy-minded, one should observe this virtue of eight precepts on the fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth days of the lunar fortnight [and during the three rainy months together with those preceding and following this season, five months in all]. Then on the following morning, the wise one who has observed eight precepts should happily provide the Community of Monks with food and drink in a suitable manner.

“Let him support his father and mother in a proper manner and also pursue a blameless career. The householder observing these duties with diligence is reborn in the sphere of ‘self-luminant’ beings.”

The *first precept*, to abstain from taking life, involves non-violence, non-killing. As we become more developed in the spiritual life, we realize the need to live so that we are not creating violence around us. The more considerate, compassionate, and loving we are towards other beings, both human and non-human, the more we develop our own sense of self-respect, and the more we feel a sense of inner peace and calm.

Thus, training in the first precept means refraining from thoughts, speech, or actions that are violent or harmful both to ourselves and to other beings. It means respecting all living beings and relating to them in a more sensitive, accepting, and open way.

Let us look at refraining from killing in a little more detail to help us understand better what is involved. What constitutes killing a sentient being? First of all, it must be a sentient being. One must know it is a sentient being, and one must intend to kill it. Then one must make an effort to kill it. That includes taking action

oneself as well as encouraging someone else to do it. And, finally, the being must be killed. So we can see how important the mental factor is. If we accidentally step on an insect in the garden, we need not feel guilty about that. But any conscious or intentional killing, ranging from killing the eggs of lice or bugs or causing abortion or the slaughter of any living creature, including human beings, is wrong action.

The *second precept* is refraining from taking what has not been freely given. Obviously, this precept refers to refraining from overt stealing and robbing, but, in a more refined sense, this precept also refers to respecting the property of others. It means that we do not waste time coveting what other people have. Now, it is difficult not to want more, not to covet what others have in a society that is constantly bombarding us with messages of more, more, more. But this is not the way to develop the spiritual life. So, by following the second precept, we do not take what does not belong to us, we respect what others have without coveting it, and we lessen our own wants.

Refraining from taking what is not freely given means abstaining from taking, with the intention to steal, animate or inanimate property that belongs to someone — removing, or appropriating such property without the owner’s consent, whether by one’s own physical effort or by inciting someone else to do so.

The *third precept* is refraining from sexual misconduct. Refraining from sexual misconduct means avoiding any sexual act that would cause pain or suffering to others. Adultery, for example, causes the disruption of marriages. In addition to adultery, sexual misconduct includes rape, seduction, and other obviously inappropriate sexual behaviors, such as sexual relations of a man with a girl under the guardianship of her father, mother, or someone else taking

responsibility for her. It is also improper to have sexual relations with a minor, with someone who has taken vows of celibacy, or, for those who are married or in a committed relationship, with any person other than one's husband or wife or partner. On a more subtle level, we need to avoid any activities in which we relate to others as objects of sexual desire — such as watching pornography, talking about our physical attraction to others, and making sexual innuendoes through our words or actions — or that would cause discomfort to others.

Consideration in regard to our intimate relationships pertains to less obvious forms of sexual misbehavior. For example, if one person in a relationship is not inclined toward sexual intimacy, his or her partner needs to respect those wishes and act accordingly. Attempts to persuade one's partner to be intimate or to use sexual intimacy as a bargaining chip in the relationship demonstrates a lack of consideration and is regarded as a breach of this precept.

Buddhist monks and nuns live in strictly segregated communities and are required to refrain from any expression of sexual desire and from all sexual activity. They are also required to act very circumspectly whenever they are in contact with members of the opposite sex. In joining the Order of Monks or Nuns, they have made a conscious decision to make a maximum effort to attain Liberation, and many of the rules, as well as the organization of the Orders, help monks and nuns avoid unnecessary stimulation of sensual desires. A man or a woman who is incapable of restraint is encouraged to leave the Orders and become a lay practitioner again, with no stigma attached, and they are free also to return to the Orders.

Buddhism condemns neither premarital sex nor homosexuality. There is no direct reference to homosexuality in the first four *Nikāyas*, and the Buddha never spoke against this kind of emotion or activity. An indirect reference may occur in a single passage in the *Anguttara*

Nikāya, where monks are counseled against being overly devoted to one person. If a monk says to another monk “he is dear and lovely to me,” he is likely to be adversely affected should the beloved companion fall into error, go elsewhere, become ill, or die. The *Jātaka* Tales, on the other hand, contain several accounts of loving relationships of this kind.

The *fourth precept* is abstaining from wrong speech. This precept requires abstaining from false speech, vulgar speech, sarcasm, gossip, idle chatter, and all heedless ways in which we can use speech.

Right speech means speech that is truthful, beneficial, and neither foul nor malicious. Right speech can be divided into four parts:

1. Refraining from telling lies;
2. Refraining from back-biting and slander or false accusation;
3. Refraining from using abusive language, harsh words, and speech that is harmful to others;
4. Refraining from frivolous talk, such as telling tales or any other type of useless speech.

Specifically, right speech means cultivating the following types of speech:

1. Talk about desiring little;
2. Talk about contentment;
3. Talk about solitude, which can be physical or mental solitude and the highest solitude, *Nibbāna*;
4. Talk about remaining aloof, which includes talk about abstaining from activities that might arouse sexual desire;
5. Talk about making right effort;
6. Talk about morality (*sīla*);
7. Talk about concentration (*samādhi*);
8. Talk about wisdom (*paññā*);
9. Talk about deliverance (*vimutti*);
10. Talk about knowledge and vision of deliverance, meaning retrospective

knowledge; retrospective knowledge comes just after attaining an absorption state or one of the paths or fruition states in the four stages of Awakening.

It is actually quite difficult to practice this precept because our society involves us in so many negative speech habits. It is socially acceptable to talk about what other people are doing, to chit-chat, to exaggerate, and to chatter endlessly just to break the silence. We can also be very cruel with our speech. If we are developing a spiritual life, we have to be very careful about what we say to others or about others so that we are not intentionally causing them pain. It is inevitable that we will sometimes say things that upset people — we cannot help that. But our intention should be to refrain from speaking with malicious intent. We should take responsibility for what we say, for how we speak, and for the suggestions we give to others.

The *fifth precept* is about abstaining from drinking alcoholic beverages and using drugs. This precept is important because, for our spiritual growth, we are trying to develop a consciousness that is clear and focused. This cannot happen when we are being influenced by alcohol or drugs.

When we meditate, we start from where we are now. We do not take drugs in order to feel at one with the universe. The way to insight, unity, and oneness is not through drugs, but through Right Understanding, that is, through seeing things as they really are.

In addition, the precepts also require one to abstain from gambling with cards, dice, and so forth.

The five precepts provide the moral foundation for our practice. They need to be reaffirmed daily and made an integral part of our lives. That is to say that we must make a constant effort — we must keep reminding ourselves — to refrain from unwholesome thoughts, speech, and

actions and to nurture and perform wholesome thoughts, speech, and actions until they become second nature to us.

In all of this, mindfulness is the key for *knowing* what we are thinking, saying, or doing, and is thus the starting point. Mindfulness is the tool for *shaping* the mind, and is thus the focal point. Finally, mindfulness is the manifestation of the achieved *freedom* of the mind, and is thus the culminating point. Learning to control attention is the key to gaining access to the vital energy that drives the whole organism we call our self and to using that energy wisely. No skill in living is more useful.

Meditation

In Buddhism, there are two types of meditation: *Samatha*, or tranquility meditation, and *Vipassanā*, or insight meditation. Concentration involves the mind resting one-pointedly on an object so that the mind becomes stable and calm. The purpose of developing one-pointed attention is to slow down the flow of thoughts. The mind cannot focus on something when it is distracted by thoughts, that is, when it is swept away by or attached to thoughts. It is this inner noise that is the shield that prevents us from knowing our highest self. In tranquility meditation, the mind is focused one-pointedly without being distracted. If we can focus the mind one-pointedly without being distracted, we have achieved *Samatha*. Thus, *Samatha* is not a state of “no thought” but, rather, a state of “non-distraction.” When we develop one-pointed concentration, the mind becomes so relaxed that it rests in itself, just as it is, undistracted by thoughts.

When the mind becomes very calm and stable, it can distinguish and discriminate very clearly between all phenomena and see everything as very distinct. This ability to see all things

clearly just as they are is called insight.

Wisdom

Wisdom is the understanding, through personal experience, of the true nature of all conditioned things, that is, impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and absence of a permanent entity such as a soul or self (*anattā*). Wisdom is achieved through insight or *Vipassanā* meditation. In insight meditation, the mind is set to a perfect state of balance, and then the attention is projected to the changing nature or the unsatisfactory nature or the impersonal nature of physical and mental phenomena. It is not a mere intellectual appreciation or conceptual knowledge of these truths, but an indubitable and unshakable personal experience of them, obtained and matured through repeated meditative confrontation with the facts underlying those truths. It is the intrinsic nature of insight that it produces a growing detachment and an increasing freedom from craving, culminating in the final deliverance of the mind from all that causes its enslavement to the world of suffering. It is the nature of insight to be free from desire, aversion, and delusion and to see clearly all things in the inner and outer world as bare phenomena, that is, as impersonal processes.

External Rites and Rituals

According to the Buddha's teaching, belief in the moral efficacy of mere external rites and rituals constitutes a great obstacle to inner progress. One who takes refuge in mere external practices is on the wrong path. For, in order to achieve real inner progress, all our efforts must necessarily be based on our own understanding and insight. Any real progress is rooted in Right Understanding, and, without Right Understanding,

there will be no attainment of unshakable peace and holiness. Moreover, this blind belief in mere external practices is the cause of much misery and wretchedness in the world. It leads to mental stagnation, to fanaticism and intolerance, to self-exaltation and contempt for others, to contention, discord, war, strife, and bloodshed, as the history of the Middle Ages in Europe quite sufficiently testifies. This belief in mere external practices dulls and deadens one's power of thought and stifles every higher emotion in man. It makes him a mental slave and favors the growth of all kinds of hypocrisy.

The Buddha has clearly and positively expressed himself on this point. He says:

"The man enmeshed in delusion will never be purified through the mere study of holy books, nor sacrifices to gods, nor fasts, nor sleeping on the ground, nor difficult and strenuous vigils, nor the repetition of prayers. Neither gifts to priests, nor self-castigation, nor performance of rites and ceremonies can bring about purification in one who is filled with craving. It is not through the partaking of meat or fish that man becomes impure but through drunkenness, obstinacy, bigotry, deceit, envy, self-exaltation, disparagement of others, and evil intentions — through these things man becomes impure."

"There are two extremes: addiction to sensual enjoyment and addiction to bodily mortification. The Perfect One has rejected these two extremes and has discovered the Middle Path that makes one both see and know. It is this Middle Path which leads to peace, penetration, enlightenment, and liberation — this Middle Path is indeed that Noble Eightfold Path leading to the end of suffering, namely, Right

Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration of Mind.”

Dogmatism and Blind Faith

Inasmuch as the Buddha teaches that all genuine progress on the path of virtue is necessarily dependent upon one's own understanding and insight, all dogmatism is excluded from the Buddha's teaching. Blind faith in authority is rejected by the Buddha and is entirely opposed to the spirit of His teaching.

One who merely believes or repeats what others have found out is compared by the Buddha to a blind man. One who desires to make progress upon the Path of Deliverance must experience and understand the truth for himself. Lacking one's own understanding, no absolute progress is possible.

The teaching of the Buddha is perhaps the only religious teaching that requires no belief in traditions nor in certain historical events. It appeals solely to the understanding of each individual. For, wherever there are beings capable of thinking, there the truths proclaimed by the Buddha may be understood and realized, without regard to race, country, nationality, or position in society. These truths are universal, not bound up with any particular country or any particular epoch. And, in everyone, even in the lowliest, there lies latent the capacity for seeing and realizing these truths and attaining to the Highest Perfection. And, whosoever lives a noble life, such a one has already tasted the truth and, in greater or lesser degree, travels on the Eightfold Path of Peace, which all noble and holy ones have trodden, tread now, and shall tread in the future. The universal laws of morality hold good without variation everywhere and in all times, whether one may call oneself a Buddhist, Hindu, Jew, Christian, or Moslem, or by any other name.

It is the inward condition of a person and his deeds that count, not a mere name. The true disciple of the Buddha is far removed from all dogmatism. He is a free thinker in the noblest sense of the word. He falls neither into positive nor negative dogmas, for he knows: both are mere opinions, mere views, rooted in blindness and self-deception. Therefore, the Buddha has said of himself:

“The Perfect One is free from any theory, for the Perfect One has seen: thus is corporeality, thus it arises, thus it passes away; thus is feeling, thus it arises, thus it passes away; thus is perception, thus it arises, thus it passes away; thus are the mental formations, thus they arise, thus they pass away; thus is consciousness, thus it arises, thus it passes away.”

The Four Stages of Sainthood

Between the states of delusion, bondage, and suffering and that of complete release lie the paths and fruits of attainment, marked by the progressive elimination of ten fetters (*saṃyojana*), that is, ten mental obstructions that stand in the way of self-purification and that bind us to the wheel of existence (*saṃsāra*):

1. Personality belief — the delusion of “selfhood”
2. Skeptical doubt
3. Attachment to rites and rituals
4. Desire for gratification of the senses
5. Ill will
6. Craving for fine-material existence
7. Craving for immaterial existence
8. Conceit
9. Restlessness
10. Ignorance

One who has put an end to the first three fetters is known as a Stream-Winner (*Sotāpanna*); he has entered the stream of liberation, and his destiny has become fixed. He cannot be born in any sphere lower than the human, and if he does not attain full liberation earlier, he is bound to do so within the course of seven lives at the most. One who has reached this stage becomes incapable of committing any of the unwholesome deeds that lead to rebirth in sub-human realms of suffering. When, in addition, the next two fetters are weakened, he becomes a Once-Returner (*Sakadāgāmi*), who will not have to endure more than one rebirth in the sensuous spheres, which means that, if he fails to reach *Nibbāna* in the current life, he is bound to do so in the next birth. When all of the first five fetters, which are known as the grosser fetters, are completely destroyed, he becomes a Non-Returner (*Anāgāmi*), who will not be born again in the sensuous spheres — if he does not gain *Nibbāna* before he dies, he will reach it in the next birth, which takes place in the Pure Abodes (*Suddhāvāsa*). There he attains Arahantship and passes straight to *Nibbāna* without returning to the sensuous planes. When all ten fetters are destroyed, he attains the state of *Arahant*. He has then realized the paths and fruits of the holy life, and for him the painful round of rebirth has come to an end. These four stages of Sainthood (*Ariya-Puggala*) are sometimes separated by intervals, sometimes they follow immediately after one another, but at each stage the “fruit” or attainment follows instantly upon the realization of the path in the series of thought-moments. When the thought-moment of insight flashes forth, the meditator knows beyond all doubt the nature of his attainment and what, if anything, still needs to be accomplished.

When, by the total eradication of lust, hatred, and delusion, the *Arahant* gains *Nibbāna*, he obtains with it the type of Enlightenment, known as the Disciple’s Enlightenment (*Sāvaka-bodhi*), that goes with his attainment. That is, he

fully understands the causes of existence and how they have been counteracted, and he experiences an extension of his faculties as a consequence of the breaking down of the delusion of selfhood, which normally acts as a barrier to the mind, isolating it in the personal realm of sensory experience. But the Enlightenment of a Supreme Buddha is of a higher order and of an illimitable range. Over and above the knowledge pertaining to Arahantship, a Buddha acquires the perfect understanding of all things. This he gains as the result of his determination, formed in a previous life and realized through the cultivation of transcendent virtue, to become a Fully Enlightened One, a World Teacher for the welfare of all beings; for without that completeness of knowledge, he could not set in motion the Wheel of the *Dhamma*. But, by the nature of things, the greater part of his knowledge is not communicable to others. Nor is there a need to communicate it. In speaking of natural phenomena, the Buddha used the language and ideas of those whom he was addressing, and to whom any other ideas would have appeared bizarre and incredible. One does not speak of the general theory of relativity to a person who can barely understand Euclid. When he was questioned about whether he taught his disciples all that he knew, the Buddha replied with a simile. Placing a pinch of dust on his fingernail, he asked which was greater, the pinch of dust he was holding or the remainder of dust on the ground. The obvious answer was given, whereupon he said: “In like manner, the knowledge of the *Tathāgata* is much greater than that which he has taught.”

From this, attempts have been made to prove that the Buddha had an esoteric teaching that he reserved for a select body of disciples. But the meaning is made clear by the following: “Nevertheless, everything necessary for complete liberation has been taught by the *Tathāgata*.” And again: “The *Tathāgata* has taught the *Dhamma* without making any distinctions of esoteric and

exoteric doctrine. The *Tathāgata* does not have the closed fist of a teacher who keeps some things back.” The things the Buddha knew but did not teach were those that did not lead to liberation and, therefore, had no bearing on the task of guiding others across the ocean of *Samsāra*.

The Buddha did not encourage metaphysical speculation. He did not offer theories: “The *Tathāgata* holds no theories” is a phrase that occurs frequently in the scriptures. Having “seen the truth face to face,” he has discarded views based on mere reasoning and

imperfect knowledge. Reason is a good guide — none is better so far as it goes —, and certainly nothing that is contrary to reason should be accepted as true; but the point of departure for the ultimate destination is where unaided reason can carry us no farther. It is there that the higher mind (*adhicitta*) takes over and completes the journey. Until such time as it is allowed to do so, the analytical processes of the discriminating, conceptual mind remain to some extent a hindrance. ■

The Three Aspects of Dukkha (Suffering)

There are three aspects of *Dukkha*: (1) *Dukkha Dukkha*, which is “ordinary suffering”; (2) *Vipariṇāma Dukkha*, which is the aspect of suffering experienced by change; and (3) *Samkhāra Dukkha*, which is the aspect of suffering experienced by conditioned states.

The first aspect, *Dukkha Dukkha*, contains two components of ordinary suffering. The first refers to life, or being, as it is constituted by mental and material forces (*nāma-rūpa*), which are known more specifically as the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*). The Buddha defined these five aggregates as *Dukkha*. In other words, the bare fact of life itself is *Dukkha*. The second refers to universal maladies. When mental and material forces — the five aggregates — manifest or come into existence, they are bound to be experienced as all kinds of suffering. This is the *Dukkha* experienced in birth, sickness, old age, death, association with unloved ones and unpleasant conditions, not getting what one wants, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. In short, *Dukkha Dukkha* is all kinds of physical and mental suffering that are universally accepted as suffering or pain.

The second aspect of suffering is

Vipariṇāma Dukkha. *Vipariṇāma* means “change.” It is the nature of this universe that all things constantly change — they are impermanent by nature. Thus, a happy feeling or a happy condition cannot last. When they change, suffering, pain, or unpleasant feelings are the result. “Whatever is impermanent is suffering,” said the Buddha. Whenever one is faced with worldly vicissitudes, one experiences suffering in life. The first two aspects of suffering are easy to understand since they are common experiences in daily life. Because these aspects of suffering are readily recognizable as general experiences, they have typically come to stand for the meaning of *Dukkha* referred to in the First Noble Truth. However, this does not convey the full meaning of *Dukkha* as the Buddha used the term when referring to the First Noble Truth.

The third aspect of suffering, *Samkhāra Dukkha*, is the suffering experienced by conditioned states. Everything in the universe, whether physical or mental, is conditioned as well as conditioning. This kind of *Dukkha* will be clearly understood through direct experience in *Vipassanā* meditation. One who practices *Vipassanā* meditation needs to be constantly aware of mental and physical phenomena until he or she directly realizes the ever-changing processes that constitute the universe. Then one will understand *Dukkha* as a consequence. ■

International Meditation Center USA

Westminster, Maryland

The International Meditation Center USA was founded in 1988 to provide facilities for the instruction and practice of Theravādin Buddhist Meditation. Along with the four other International Meditation Centers in the West, it is a direct offshoot of the International Meditation Center of Yangon, Myanmar (formerly Rangoon, Burma), which was founded by Sayagyi U Ba Khin. In addition to being a highly respected meditation teacher, Sayagyi U Ba Khin was the first Accountant General of Burma after independence in 1948.

The focal point of the Center is the *Dhamma Yaung Chi Ceti* (Light of the Dhamma Pagoda). It is set on the highest point of the Center's hilltop property and is a local landmark, being visible from miles around. This beautiful Pagoda is modeled on the Pagoda at the International Meditation Center, Yangon, Myanmar, and is similar in design to the Pagodas at our five other centers around the world. It was built and dedicated in 1991. The domes were extensively refashioned and gilded in the summers of 1998 and 1999, and a rededication ceremony, along with the installation of new dome ornaments, took place in May, 2000. The Pagoda has seven cells for meditation and an eighth cell that houses a Buddha shrine. Local students use the Pagoda daily for meditation practice.

IMC is a non-profit religious organization, supported completely by donations. It is run by local students under the guidance of our teacher, Mother Sayamagyi. Local students see to the daily administrative tasks at the center. Two resident teachers live adjacent to the center. With the help of local students who cook and manage, they conduct most of the courses at the center.

Meditation courses are conducted in the *Dhamma Hall*. Cushions are provided to sit on, though senior citizens or others who have difficulty sitting on the floor are welcome to use chairs. The daily schedule consists mostly of meditation, with two *Dhamma* talks, in the early morning and evening, when various aspects of the meditation, the tradition of U Ba Khin, and Theravādin Buddhism are explained. New students meet twice daily with the teachers for interviews; the teachers are also available at other times in the day when needed. The management tries to provide the students with all the support they need in order to gain the full benefit of the ten-day retreat period.

Students attending retreats are accommodated in dormitories. Men's and women's facilities are entirely separate. Students should expect to share a room with at least one other student on our larger courses (typically in the summer), though it is possible on smaller retreats at other times of year that you will have a room of your own.

Wholesome and tasty vegetarian food is served on our courses. Breakfast is served at 6:30 a.m. Lunch at 11 a.m. is the main meal of the day. New students can also take a light meal in the evening at 5 p.m., but old students normally observe eight precepts and don't take food after noon. The dining area is open at all times, and students are free to take refreshments there. Students with special dietary needs should indicate this on their application forms.

Seven acres of grounds provide a pleasant area for relaxation, away from most of the noises of civilization — barring the occasional farm machine. The pine trees that surround the center provide a perimeter walk for students wishing to take exercise between meditation sessions. Our center is at the end of a private road, far removed from the distractions of the world and an ideal setting for a period of retreat.

Students are asked to contribute \$350.00 for the 10-day course as a contribution towards the cost of food, accommodations, and utilities. There is no charge for the teaching. Those with financial difficulties are invited to approach the management. For more information or to make course reservations, call the Center at (410) 346-7889. ■

Charleston Buddhist Fellowship

Membership

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship encourages sincere practitioners to become members and to become active in promoting and supporting the activities of the organization. Members receive mailings and are given priority and discounts at teachings and events. Membership contributions help support the on-going activities of the organization and help cover operating expenses such as producing, printing, and mailing notices of events and special activities, mailbox fees, cost of preparing and producing teaching material, etc.

The membership fee is \$10.00 per person per month, if paid monthly, or \$100.00 per person per year, if paid annually. Checks should be made payable to "Allan R. Bomhard."

Membership Form:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

Home phone: _____

E-mail: _____

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ZIP: _____

Return forms to: Charleston Buddhist Fellowship ♦ 940 Rutledge Avenue ♦ Charleston, SC 29403-3206

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